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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 25 September 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Sharma ..... (Nepal)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Election of the Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur

1. **The Chairman** said that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/163, the Committee must elect three Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur. He would take it that the Committee wished to elect as Vice-Chairmen Mr. Dragulescu (Romania), Mr. Kendall (Argentina) and Mr. Tilemans (Belgium), who had been endorsed by the Group of Eastern European States, the Group of Latin American and Carribbean States and the Group of Western European and Other States respectively.

2. *Mr. Dragulescu (Romania), Mr. Kendall (Argentina) and Mr. Tilemans (Belgium) were elected Vice-Chairmen by acclamation.*

3. **The Chairman** said he would take it that the Committee wished to elect as Rapporteur Mr. Getachew (Ethiopia), who had been endorsed by the Group of African States.

4. *Mr. Getachew (Ethiopia) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

Organization of work (A/57/250; A/C.5/57/1; A/C.5/57/L.1)

5. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider the programme of work for the main part of the current session, as set forth in the informal paper circulated to delegations. He drew attention to document A/C.5/57/1, which listed the agenda items allocated to the Committee by the General Assembly, and to document A/C.5/57/L.1, which listed the related documentation.

6. He noted that the Committee must conclude its work by Friday, 6 December 2002, in the afternoon, which would require self-discipline on the part of delegations. In particular, members must ensure that meetings began on time and that optimum use was made of the conference services assigned to the Committee. He trusted that the Fifth Committee would set an example to the other Main Committees in that respect. Since 2002 was a personnel year, a significant portion of the Committees time would be devoted to the agenda item on human resources management, but there were also many important budgetary issues on the agenda, and each one must be accorded the attention it deserved. In the light of the Committee's heavy workload, priority might have to be given to issues that were time bound.

7. The objectivity and fairness of Member States would be put to the test over the coming months in long and delicate negotiations. The Committee was renowned, however, for its teamwork. He therefore trusted that delegations would be able to rise above national interests and that the Committee's tradition of decision-making by consensus would be maintained.

8. **Mr. Christiansen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Norway, said that there were many important issues before the Committee at the current session. He was therefore concerned to note that a large proportion of the relevant documents had not been made available to delegations on time. The European Union, however, would work constructively to overcome the problems caused by those delays. He trusted that the Committee would contribute to the strengthening of the United Nations at the current session by taking forward-looking decisions with respect to the capital master plan. He was grateful to the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Committee on Contributions and the Committee on Conferences for their reports.

9. The European Union endorsed the recommendations made by the Secretary-General concerning the Committee's work in document A/BUR/57/1. It agreed that, in order for the Committee to complete its work by Friday, 6 December 2002, in the afternoon, punctuality would be of the utmost importance. It therefore stood ready to start meetings promptly at 10 a.m. and adjourn them precisely at 6 p.m. on all weekdays.

10. **Mr. Pulido León** (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Committee's programme of work should reflect a balanced allocation of time and give priority to those issues that were time bound. The guiding principle for the inclusion of items in the programme of work should be the requests made in the resolutions of the General Assembly at previous sessions.

11. The Group of 77 and China was deeply concerned about the late issuance of documentation, a problem that seemed to have worsened at the current session and would surely disrupt the smooth work of the

Committee. The Secretariat must ensure compliance with the six-week rule, which was reaffirmed every year by the General Assembly, and with the relevant provisions of resolution 54/248 and of the Assembly's rules of procedure.

12. He noted that no meetings had been scheduled for the consideration of such issues as mobility, discrimination in recruitment, and monitoring and control mechanisms in the Office of Human Resources Management, even though 2002 was a personnel year. Moreover, some reports that had been issued were not scheduled to be taken up.

13. The Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the efficient functioning of the Committee. It was therefore ready to engage in constructive negotiations on the complex issues before the Committee so as to enable the current session to be brought to a successful conclusion, within the specified time limit.

14. **Mr. Aguilar Zinser** (Mexico), speaking also on behalf of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela, said that the Member States on whose behalf he spoke were concerned at the quality of the translation and interpretation services provided into Spanish and at the quality of the interpretation services provided from Spanish into the other official languages of the Organization.

15. There were currently more than 400 million Spanish speakers worldwide. According to some population projections, that number could climb to 550 million by the year 2050. Paradoxically, however, Spanish appeared to be losing ground in the United Nations at a time when more and more people were using the language, including in countries in which the native language was not Spanish, and when the international profile of the language was being elevated through its contributions to global culture and its growing political and economic importance.

16. The United Nations had been created to promote dialogue between Member States as a means of resolving their differences. Multilingualism was the perfect tool for facilitating dialogue and negotiation. That was why the political organs of the United Nations inserted a provision in their rules of procedure specifying their official and working languages.

17. The 20 Spanish-speaking Member States wished to reaffirm their commitment to multilingualism and to express their concern at the steady deterioration in the quality of translation and interpretation into Spanish, which ran counter to the principle of multilingualism and adversely affected the dialogue that was such an essential tool of the Organization.

18. Despite the General Assembly's yearly resolutions on the quality of the conference services provided to Member States, the situation of Spanish had not improved. The Spanish-speaking Member States had noted with concern the steady decline in the quality of translation into Spanish and had listened in astonishment and frustration to the poor interpretations into the other official languages of statements delivered in Spanish and at times from the other languages into Spanish. They had drawn attention to the errors at the time that they had been made, but had now concluded that individual complaints were not enough to resolve the problem.

19. Acting in accordance with Assembly resolution 56/242, the Spanish-speaking Member States had twice met and held friendly and frank discussions with the Chiefs of the Spanish Interpretation Section and Spanish Translation Service, who had listened carefully and respectfully to their concerns. They in turn had taken note of the concerns of the two Chiefs and could once more attest to the staff's commitment to the Organization, deep sense of professionalism and love for the Spanish language.

20. The dialogue between the Secretariat and the Spanish-speaking Member States had been fruitful and had given the Member States a clearer idea of the problems facing the Spanish translation and interpretation units. The Spanish-speaking Member States had concluded that a comprehensive review of translation and interpretation into all the official languages was needed with a view to raising standards to a level of excellence. They therefore requested that a report be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-eighth regular session under the agenda items "Pattern of conferences" and "Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005" containing an evaluation of the current situation of the translation and interpretation services, their workloads, staffing and equipment, and the quality of their output. The report should include specific proposals to raise the standard of those services.

21. Pending the submission of the report, the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management should make an effort to remedy the many problems of interpretation and translation with which the Spanish-speaking Member States were confronted and report on the progress achieved.

22. The 20 Spanish-speaking Member States were committed to the United Nations and believed that dialogue was an expression of civility and tolerance. Without dialogue, diplomacy could not be effective. They remained convinced that multilingualism was one of the ways of strengthening dialogue and the work of the Organization.

23. **Mr. Stoffer** (United States of America) said that his delegation stood ready to cooperate with other members to ensure that the Committee concluded its work by Friday, 6 December 2002, in the afternoon. Regarding the programme of work, he requested that the capital master plan should be scheduled for consideration by the Committee as soon as possible so that the next steps envisaged in the plan could be implemented in a timely and orderly manner. He expressed appreciation to the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Committee on Contributions and the Committee on Conferences for their reports.

24. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that her delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Regarding the programme of work, she asked whether the Bureau would allocate time for consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for change (A/57/387), which contained proposals with far-reaching administrative and budgetary implications, including a proposal to amend the procedure for the intergovernmental review of budgets. She noted, in that connection, that the General Assembly had reaffirmed the role of the Fifth Committee as the appropriate Main Committee entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters.

25. She expressed concern that, because of technical problems, the proposed programme budget outline for the biennium 2004-2005, the first performance report for the biennium 2002-2003 and the reports on results-based budgeting would not be taken up until later in the session. Noting that the Committee must conclude its work by Friday, 6 December 2002, in the afternoon, she said that it was vital to allow sufficient time for consideration of those important matters.

26. More meetings should have been scheduled for consideration of the item on pattern of conferences so as to enable the Committee to review in depth the proposals made in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289). In addition, more time was needed for discussion of the two reports on the Department of Public Information submitted under the agenda item on the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003.

27. Lastly, she thanked the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Committee on Contributions and the Committee on Conferences for their reports, which facilitated the Fifth Committee's work.

28. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. With regard to the programme of work, he said that more meetings should have been scheduled for consideration of the agenda items on human resources management and pattern of conferences. The number of informal meetings programmed for discussion of the latter item was not in line with what had been agreed previously. The Committee should be able to consider that important item without undue pressure of time, and the programme of work should be revised accordingly.

29. **Mr. Acakpo-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee), addressing the concerns raised by the representative of Cuba, said that the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387) should first be considered by the plenary Assembly under agenda item 52. The Assembly might then decide to refer it to the Fifth Committee for further consideration. In order to allow members to participate in the debate in the plenary Assembly, no meetings had been scheduled for the Fifth Committee on the two mornings during which the report was to be considered by the Assembly. The Bureau would review the various requests made by delegations and present proposals for adjustments to the Committee's programme of work.

30. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation would prefer to see the revised programme of work before it was adopted.

31. **Mr. Acakpo-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee) said that, because the various groups in the Committee had different priorities, it was important for the Bureau to first review any requests that had been made before presenting its own proposals for adjustments to the proposed programme of work. The nature of the adjustments would be determined by the realities of the work to be accomplished and the evolution of the debates.

32. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that it was precisely because of the Committee's heavy workload and the concerns of the various delegations that the proposed changes to the programme of work should be put to the Committee before it was adopted.

33. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) proposed that the Committee should adopt the proposed programme of work and accept in good faith the offer by the Bureau to make the necessary adjustments so as to reflect the various concerns that had been expressed by members.

34. **The Chairman** said he took it that the Committee wished to approve its programme of work on the understanding that adjustments would be made during the course of the session, as necessary.

35. *It was so decided.*

36. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to the recommendations that had been made by the plenary Assembly at its 19th meeting, held on 20 September 2002, which were contained in the first report of the General Committee (A/57/250). In particular, paragraph 47 of the report of the General Committee cited decision 34/401 of the Assembly, which stated, inter alia, that it was imperative that Main Committees should allow sufficient time for the preparation of the estimate of expenditures by the Secretariat and for its consideration by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee and that they should take that requirement into account when they adopted their programme of work. The decision also stipulated that a mandatory deadline, not later than 1 December, should be established for the submission to the Fifth Committee of all draft resolutions with financial implications. He also wished to draw attention to the General Committee's observations on the organization of the work of the General Assembly, which were contained in paragraphs 59 and 60 of document A/57/250.

37. In the light of the decision of the General Assembly that the Fifth Committee should complete its work on Friday, 6 December, the Bureau was of the firm view that the Chairman should convey to the President of the General Assembly and through him to the Chairmen of other Main Committees an appeal that consideration of all draft resolutions having programme budget implications should be completed by 22 November, so as to allow sufficient time for the necessary preparation of statements on programme budget implications for consideration by the Advisory Committee and finally by the Fifth Committee.

38. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee had taken note of the recommendations of the General Assembly and of the comments that he had just made.

39. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 117: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/C.5/56/46)

40. **The Chairman** drew attention to a letter dated 27 June 2002 from the Acting President of the General Assembly addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/56/46) transmitting a letter dated 21 June 2002 from the Chairman of the Committee on Contributions addressed to the President of the General Assembly and reproducing the relevant sections of the report of that Committee on its sixty-second session concerning requests for exemption under Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations from Burundi, the Comoros, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, the Republic of Moldova, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia and Tajikistan.

41. **Mr. Christiansen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Norway, said that the application of Article 19 of the Charter must be fair and consistent. The European Union wished to underline the absolutely essential role of the Committee on Contributions in giving definitive guidance to the General Assembly in that regard.

42. The European Union had noted with concern that eight Member States were applying for exemptions under Article 19. It was pleased to note, however, that four of those States had presented multi-year payment plans and it encouraged the other Member States in question to do the same as early as possible. It noted, furthermore, that the Committee on Contributions had been unable to take action on a request from one Member State, whose application had been received too late. The European Union was prepared to accept the recommendations made by the Committee on Contributions in its report.

43. **Mr. Nteturuye** (Burundi) said that the late submission of Burundi's request for exemption under Article 19 had been due to ongoing consultations with the capital to determine what initiatives could be taken to enable Burundi to retain its voting rights in the Assembly. Regrettably, none of the initiatives considered had borne fruit for a number of reasons. Teachers in Burundi were on strike for higher salaries and the civil war, which had been raging for some nine years, and in particular the regional embargo that had been imposed on Burundi, had destroyed the country's economy and pushed more than 60 per cent of the population below the poverty line. The Government was seeking dialogue and a political solution to the conflict, but the absence of a ceasefire was an obstacle to the implementation of the Arusha Peace Accords that had been negotiated under the aegis of the former President of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Mandela.

44. On the economic front, while some progress had been made in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, the conditions that were being imposed, such as devaluation of the national currency, were extremely harsh. Despite those circumstances, however, Burundi was committed to paying its assessed contributions as early as possible.

45. **Mr. Pulido León** (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the information that had been presented by the representative of Burundi concerning the situation in that Member State. The Group of 77 and China supported Burundi's request for exemption under Article 19 of the Charter.

46. **Mr. Ekorong A Dong** (Cameroon), joined by **Mr. Maiga** (Mali), **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), **Mr. El Atrash** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), **Mr. Acemah** (Uganda), **Mr. Elgammal** (Egypt), **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco), **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia), **Mr. Chaudhry** (Pakistan), **Mr. Mustafa** (Sudan) and **Mr. Bouheddou** (Algeria), supported the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Burundi should also be included in the recommendation that had been made by the Committee on Contributions with respect to the other seven States that had requested exemptions under Article 19.

47. **Mr. Christiansen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated countries, reiterated the European Union's acceptance of the recommendations that had been made by the Committee on Contributions.

48. **The Chairman** said that the matter would be referred to informal consultations and the recommendations emanating therefrom would be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its next formal meeting.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.